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SHINE

BRIGHTER · FURTHER · TOGETHER

DISCIPLESHIP JOURNEY GUIDE



Let your good deeds **SHINE** out for all to see,
so that **EVERYONE** will praise your heavenly Father.

Matthew 5:16

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Those who study church lifecycles suggest that after 40 years of existence, the typical church's growth will plateau. As it turns 50 years old, the church approaches a fork in the road, opting for either renewal or decline. There are distractions and dangers near this intersection, and many churches falter in the years that follow.

You and I are part of an unusual church. For 125 years, God has led West Side through generational handoffs and enormous societal change, while helping us retain our core mission, identity and message. Thanks to his grace and guidance, we are a church that is refreshingly engaging, while remaining unchanged in essential ways.

As West Side steps into the future, we sense God calling us to be bolder than ever. We hear him saying (Matthew 5:16), **"Let your good deeds SHINE out for all to see, so that EVERYONE will praise your heavenly Father."** The season of generosity we are entering is a reflection of the Kingdom ambition and urgency that Jesus modeled.

While there are specific and costly projects before us, Shine is not a mere fundraising campaign. It is a discipleship journey and a direct extension of our purpose. As we travel through this season together, yes, we will be challenged to trust more deeply and give more generously, but ultimately, our motive is to see more people find and follow Jesus.

In the weeks ahead, you will hear more details about Shine. In the meantime, decide only to make this journey with us. If you do, God will show you anything else he wants for you and from you.

Let's go and let's SHINE!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eddie Lowen'.

Eddie Lowen
Lead Pastor



1901



West Side Christian Church begins at the corner of State & Edwards streets with 110 original members determined to share Jesus and build God's church in Springfield, Illinois.

1939

1944—1949



West Side plants three churches in Springfield: Bunn Park Church of Christ, South Side Christian Church and Monroe Street Christian Church.



West Side establishes Springfield Christian Preschool (formerly Christian Day Care Center).

1961



West Side launches Springfield Christian School (originally Christian Day School) on its campus.

1951



West Side launches Lake Springfield Christian Assembly, a camp and retreat center that shapes campers for generations to come.

West Side purchases 47 acres on Cider Mill Lane.



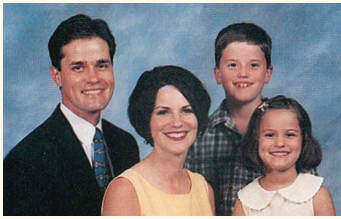
1984



West Side opens a new sanctuary at State & Edwards, creating room for continued growth.

1990

1993—1996



Eddie Lowen becomes Lead Pastor, beginning a new season of leadership and growth.



In preparation to relocate, West Side sells its State & Edwards building and worships at Springfield High School during construction.

1996



West Side holds its first service at the Cider Mill Lane campus.

2000

2001



West Side celebrates its 100th Anniversary.

2002



Myanmar Hope becomes a key global mission partner.

2004



Central India Christian Mission becomes a key mission partner.

2007



West Side partners with Missions of Hope International in Kenya, introducing child sponsorships and large-scale mission trips, and connecting local generosity to global transformation.

2008



West Side begins planting churches in major cities: Miami, Paris, New York City, Seattle, Salt Lake City and beyond.

2010



West Side launches Springfield Sharefest, renovating Harvard Park Elementary School in a defining moment of serving our city.

2011

2012



West Side hosts its first Baptism Day, starting an annual tradition that leads hundreds into a relationship with Jesus.



TryChurchOnline.com launches, inviting people worldwide into West Side's teaching and worship.

2014

2015

2017

2018



A two-year generosity initiative called Fearless begins, funding a new worship center, a concourse addition, and new kids space, while increasing local and global impact.



The EVERYONE movement begins, reminding our community that Jesus and our church are for EveryONE.



West Side hosts A Night of Stars for the first time, a prom night experience for those with disabilities.



Elevate, a generosity initiative, funds construction of The Hub Student Center, Fireside Café and a Worship Center renovation, plus church planting and mission expansion. Meanwhile, a 4th Sunday service is added to accommodate on-campus growth.



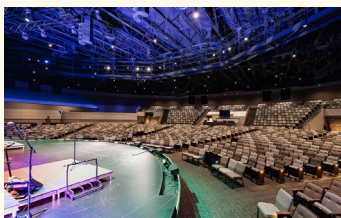
Rooted, a 10-week discipleship journey, is offered for the first time at West Side.

2019



West Side opens a new kids wing, continuing its mission to reach the next generation.

2021



After two years of construction, West Side celebrates the grand opening of its new 2,000-seat Worship Center.

2022



West Side expands school partnerships beyond Harvard Park Elementary to include Jefferson Middle School and Lanphier High School.

2025

2026



West Side celebrates its 125th anniversary!
We launch Shine, a one-year initiative that honors 125 years of faithful ministry and invests in the next 25 years of gospel impact—for the sake of the poor, the marginalized, and those who have yet to know and follow Jesus.



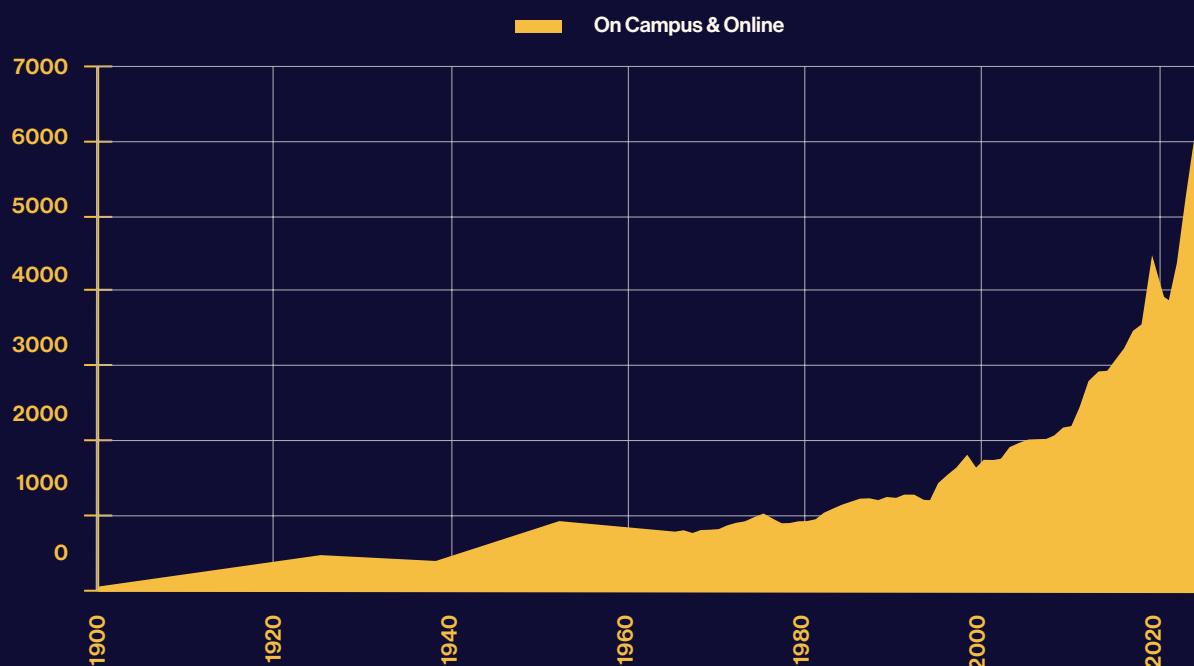
A record 389 people are baptized in a single year at West Side, surrendering their lives to follow Jesus.



God's faithfulness—*accelerated*.

117 YEARS TO 3,496 8 YEARS TO 6,374

West Side Average Weekly Attendance



*2026 average attendance as of 4/12/2026.

117 years to reach the first 3,496

(from 1901—2018)

8 years to add another 2,878

(from 2018—2026)

+82.3% growth in just 8 years

For 125 years, God has expanded West Side's reach—across our city, beyond our walls, and around the world. And he's not finished yet.

Let's celebrate all that he has done thus far before we step into the next chapter:



10,228

Baptisms from 1901 to August 30, 2026



1,470

Current Volunteers



1,247

Kids sponsored through
Missions of Hope International



47

Local and Global
Mission Partners



11

Church Plants since 2000

These numbers tell just part of the story of what God has done through West Side and help us anticipate what's still to come!



WHERE WE ARE GOING

WORSHIP CENTER



GET READY TO SHINE

BRIGHTER, FURTHER, TOGETHER

Very few things survive 125 years, much less thrive.

Now, a century and a quarter later, here we are—gathering with thousands, celebrating hundreds of baptisms year after year, and experiencing new, deep life in our church that only comes from God.

The coming season will be an extraordinary one for our church as we say yes to partnering with God and with one another to shine brighter still.

As we praise God for 125 years of faithfulness, we are also asking him to help us shine brighter than ever in our dark and broken world.

We believe God is guiding us to shine BRIGHTER by strengthening our ongoing ministries and to shine FURTHER by making more and better room on our campus for those who don't yet know and follow Jesus. We are also hearing his call to draw near to the hurting, to stand alongside the unseen, and to invest in those around the world who need him in bigger and bolder ways than ever before.

Above all, we want to shine TOGETHER. Our goal is to experience the greatest single year of unity, alignment, and generosity in West Side's history, so we can take new ground for God's Kingdom.

Are *YOU* ready to SHINE?

So often we find ourselves coasting along through life, letting our light dim as we settle for complacency and comfort. We spend our lives investing in things that are temporary rather than eternal. What could be waiting for us if we awakened to the urgency of reaching a lost and hurting world? What awaits us when we fully entrust our lives to a God whose mission is to shine light into the darkest places? We believe God wants to do more in us and through us than ever. Now is the time to shine, for his glory and for the good of the world. ***Are you ready?***



Our Primary Goal:

100% ENGAGEMENT

What will God do in us? We desire for every person at West Side to take a step in their devotion to Jesus and grow in generosity. Our prayer is that God will open our hearts, reshape our priorities, and free us up to go all in for Jesus and his mission. More than anything, this is a season of spiritual renewal, as we welcome God to do a deep work in us.

Our Secondary Goal:

\$21 MILLION

(Dec 2026—Dec 2027)

SHINE BRIGHTER: \$11.5 MILLION

We believe God is inviting us to unleash our existing ministries to shine even brighter. This represents our **general operating budget for 2027**. Through this investment, we are strengthening our ongoing efforts so that even more people can experience the life-changing love of Jesus.

SHINE FURTHER: \$9.5 MILLION

As we celebrate 125 years and prepare for the next 25, we believe God wants us to thoughtfully improve and recalibrate our campus so we can better host and reach our ONES (people close to us and far from God).

We also sense God inviting us to come near to those who have been overlooked and to stand alongside the vulnerable, both in our community and around the world. This represents projects and initiatives above and beyond our general operating budget.

SHINE TOGETHER

We desire to do all things together in love and unity.

God, what do you want to do in me?

God, what do you want to do through me?

Vision Initiatives:

SHINE BRIGHTER

We believe God is inviting us to unleash our existing ministries to be places and spaces that effectively reach and disciple people right where we live.

SHINE FURTHER

We also sense God calling us to prepare our campus for future generations, extend our reach to the underserved and overlooked, raise up the next generation of kingdom leaders, plant new churches, and fuel major projects for our mission partners in Springfield and around the world.

SHINE TOGETHER

God, move through us so we can care well for every person you bring to us.



Brighter—Further—Together

Remodeled Infant & Toddler Space	Our infant, toddler and two-year-old spaces are now 16 years old and in need of updating. We want church to feel warm and inviting to every person who walks through our doors, especially our littlest Westsiders.
New Roof	After 30 years, the roof on the original building of our campus must be replaced in order to protect our campus for future generations.
Auditorium Technology Upgrades	As our Worship Center reaches capacity during our busiest services, it's time to upgrade aging technology in the Auditorium so this space can host overflow worship services, as well as our growing classes, group gatherings and Bible studies throughout the week.
Drop-Off Canopy	We hope to add a drop-off canopy to the Circle Drive Entrance, making it easier for our senior adults and those with mobility issues to get to church during inclement weather.
Debt Retirement	By retiring the oldest portion of our debt, we'll free up nearly \$1 million a year to invest in life-changing ministry.
Church Planting	We will strategically partner with church planters to launch two new churches over the next two years in under-churched regions.
College Campus Ministry	We want to do all we can to strengthen and expand ministry on college campuses in our region and give college students every opportunity to know and follow Jesus during this pivotal season of life.
Disabilities Ministry	Every person is fearfully and wonderfully made, and we want EVERYONE—regardless of ability—to feel fully known, deeply valued, and genuinely included in God's family. Our hope is to expand our programming so people with disabilities and their caregivers can experience belonging and the love of Jesus every week.
New School in Kenya	Years ago, Morokani—our adopted community in rural Kenya—welcomed Missions of Hope International to plant a Christian school in their Muslim region, drawn by the educational and vocational opportunities it would offer their children. That school has now reached capacity, with hundreds of children unable to attend for lack of space. We hope to build an additional facility so hundreds more students and their families can encounter help and hope through Jesus.
Local Compassion Project	In 2027, we'll continue the work of Springfield Sharefest with a neighborhood makeover designed to create meaningful, lasting impact for people experiencing homelessness in Springfield.
Expanded Internship and Residency Programs	Our passion is to train up and send out leaders for Kingdom service at West Side, throughout our region, and around the world. Through Bible and Theology courses offered in partnership with Lincoln Christian Institute, along with hands-on ministry training and leadership development from our staff, we're expanding our internship and residency programs to equip more future leaders than ever before.







One year of sacrificial generosity
to shine the light of Jesus into the lives
of those near and far.

TOTAL: \$21 MILLION





THE GIVING JOURNEY

Everything we have is a gift from God and generosity is how we put it to work for his kingdom. Shine is an invitation to grow in giving, one step at a time, as God shapes us to look more like Jesus. Wherever you are today, there's a next step for you.

EVER

PRIORITY GIVER

A priority giver recognizes that everything belongs to Jesus, and because he is first in all things, generosity becomes a priority rather than an afterthought. Instead of allowing spending and saving to determine what is left to give, they let their commitment to Christ shape every financial decision. In doing so, they experience the freedom that comes from serving one Master and declaring that Jesus is their first priority (Matthew 6:19-24; Colossians 1:15-20).

CONSISTENT GIVER

A consistent giver has made generosity a regular part of following Jesus. Rather than giving only when it's convenient or when prompted by a special need, they choose to give faithfully as an ongoing act of worship. Consistent givers often utilize e-giving to ensure they are acting on their good intentions. As generosity becomes a rhythm of life, they experience the joy of growing in this grace (2 Corinthians 8:7).

INITIAL GIVER

An initial giver is someone taking their first step of generosity in response to God's invitation. Whether the gift is large or small, this step is an act of faith and trust. As they begin putting Jesus' teaching into practice, they discover the joy that comes with trusting him with their finances (Matthew 7:24).

ETERNAL GIVER

SURRENDERED GIVER

A surrendered giver understands that Jesus gave everything for us and responds by doing the same—placing every part of their life in his hands. Generosity is no longer just about finances; it becomes an expression of wholehearted surrender. Surrendered givers continually ask, “Does every part of my life belong to Jesus?” Their money, home, time, gifts, and influence are all seen as resources entrusted to them for God’s purposes (Ephesians 5:1–2; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5).

An eternal giver sees beyond today’s needs to the lasting impact of every act of generosity. They recognize that every gift helps create opportunities for people to know and follow Jesus, and that changes eternity. This eternal perspective shapes not only their giving but also their spending, saving, relationships, and the way they invest their time and energy in their own lives and the lives of others. They find deep joy in living for and giving toward what will last forever (1 Timothy 6:18–19).

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

—1 TIMOTHY 6:18–19



GOD, SHINE IN ME

You may have been part of church campaigns in the past where you were asked to give something “above and beyond” your regular offering—maybe for a building fund or a missions project. At West Side, we believe we’re all on ONE MISSION: to connect EVERYONE to Jesus and his mission. So, we want to encourage all of us to unleash our generosity toward that mission.

Beginning in December 2026, every gift you give to West Side Christian Church will go toward both our ongoing ministries and the vision God has placed in front of us for the future. We’re treating these priorities as one, and our leadership team will set a single budget that covers the commitments we make together during this Shine season. It’s all part of one vision, moving toward what God is calling us to do.

We’ve included a copy of the commitment card in this book so you may begin to pray about your financial involvement in this movement and what that will mean for your journey with God over the next year. Please take time to think and pray through this and discuss it with those closest to you.


GOD, SHINE IN ME

\$

What I/we would normally give to West Side in one year
(regular giving, special projects, etc.)

↓

+

\$

My/Our expanded annual generosity as part of the SHINE initiative

↓

+

\$

Gifts from my/our stored resources
(savings, stocks/investments, property, possessions, etc.)

↓

MY/OUR TOTAL ONE-YEAR COMMITMENT

\$

DECEMBER 2026 — DECEMBER 2027

ONE-YEAR GIFT CHART

As you pray and discern how God may be inviting you to give during this season, we encourage you to use this gift chart as a discipleship tool—one that inspires and challenges you toward greater generosity. May we all give as generously as we are able, for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom.

GIFTS NEEDED	GIFT LEVEL	MONTHLY GIFT	GIFT LEVEL TOTAL
1	\$1,750,000	\$145,833	\$1,750,000
1	\$1,500,000	\$125,000	\$1,500,000
2	\$750,000	\$62,500	\$1,500,000
2	\$500,000	\$41,667	\$1,000,000
3	\$350,000	\$29,167	\$1,050,000
4	\$250,000	\$20,833	\$1,000,000
5	\$150,000	\$12,500	\$750,000
7	\$125,000	\$10,417	\$875,000
8	\$100,000	\$8,333	\$800,000
15	\$75,000	\$6,250	\$1,125,000
20	\$65,000	\$5,417	\$1,300,000
25	\$50,000	\$4,167	\$1,250,000
45	\$35,000	\$2,917	\$1,575,000
55	\$25,000	\$2,083	\$1,375,000
75	\$15,000	\$1,250	\$1,125,000
90	\$10,000	\$833	\$900,000
110	\$7,500	\$625	\$825,000
125	\$5,000	\$417	\$625,000
150	\$2,500	\$208	\$375,000
MANY	\$1,000	\$83	\$300,000
TOTAL GIFT GOAL			\$21,000,000



What Can You Do Next?

PRAY PERSISTENTLY

Ask God to move in the heart of every person at West Side.
Pray we will hear his invitation clearly and respond with active faith
as we partner with him in this season.

COMMIT FULLY

Choose to be part of our goal of 100% engagement and
encourage others to do the same.

CELEBRATE LOUDLY

God will do meaningful and transformative work in your life during this season.
Joyfully share with those around you how he is at work in you.

GIVE GENEROUSLY

Ask God to show you what it looks like to give in a way that grows
and transforms you, and then take whatever bold steps of obedience
he directs you to take.

Key Dates:

SHINE TEACHING SERIES

Sundays, Oct 18—Nov 15

ADVANCE COMMITMENT NIGHT

Sunday, Nov 1, 5:00pm

COMMITMENT SUNDAY

Sunday, Nov 15



“In the same way, let your good deeds SHINE out for all to see, so that EVERYONE will praise your heavenly Father.”

—Matthew 5:16



DISCIPLESHIP JOURNEY GUIDE

OCTOBER 18–24

WEEK 1: BROKEN OPEN

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NOVEMBER 8–14

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NOVEMBER 15–21

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MESSAGE NOTES

[illegible]

- **What stood out to you from Sunday's service?**
- **What challenged, comforted, or resonated with you?**



GROUP TIME

NOTES:

Write down details and highlights from your group discussion time.

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of 25 horizontal lines.

[illegible]



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

This week, consider some practical ways to stay connected to God and continue your spiritual journey. Below are some suggestions to prompt you; choose one or more of the practices listed to help you spend intentional time with God this week. Set aside a time and place that help you pause and be present with God.

PRACTICING SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Before you open your Bible, pause for a few moments of quiet. Ask God to meet you as you read and meditate.



Read **NEHEMIAH 1:1-11** several times, slowly. Consider reading it in The Message version.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

Talk to God about what you observe, wonder, and feel.

PRACTICING PRAYERS OF LAMENT

NEHEMIAH 1:4:

I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

We are invited to honestly grieve the pain and brokenness around us and throughout the world. Choose one of the following ways to pray a lament prayer, telling the truth about what is wrong:

- Write out a prayer – type it in a note or write it out on paper.
- Take a walk and talk with God (silently or out loud).
- Draw a picture.
- Lie down on the floor, face down (or another prayer posture that allows your body to grieve).

PRACTICING PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

NEHEMIAH 1:6:

“I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned!”

Sometimes the pain and brokenness we experience is from our own actions or inactions. Come clean with God about your part. Name it, own it, and offer it to him. If you have a trusted Christian friend, tell them about it and then ask them to pray with you, reminding you of God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

PRACTICING REFLECTION

1. What is something that breaks your heart and grieves you?

2. How do you think God feels about that same issue or situation?

3. How might God already be at work here?

4. Is there a way God wants you to join in his work?



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PRACTICING BIBLE STUDY

Learn more about the story of Nehemiah and God’s people who were seeking to rebuild Jerusalem after being conquered and displaced by the Babylonian Empire.

- Look at the appendix (p. 58—61) for a timeline, a video link, and an overview of the history of Ezra and Nehemiah.
- Take some notes about what you observe. Write down questions you have that you want to explore more.



Read 2 KINGS 24–25, 2 CHRONICLES 36, and JEREMIAH 29.

PRACTICING PRAYER

NEHEMIAH 2:4:

The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven.

Take some time to ask yourself the same question: What is it you want? As you consider that, talk to God about what comes to the surface of your mind and heart. Do this several times this week.

After you’ve considered this question and prayed, write out your prayer to God in the space below:

PRACTICING REFLECTION

1. Do you boldly ask God for things? Why or why not?

2. Is there anything you've wanted to ask for that you have not? Why is that?

3. What has God been bringing to your attention this week? Are there people, themes, Scriptures, or images that stand out to you?



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[illegible]

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ONE NEXT STEP I CAN TAKE THIS WEEK:



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PRACTICING SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Before you open your Bible, pause for a few moments of quiet. Ask God to meet you as you read and meditate.



Read 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–27 several times, slowly.

Consider listening to an audio version or reading it in several different translations.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

Talk to God about what you observe, wonder, and feel.

PRACTICING PRAYER WHILE WORKING

While prayer often happens in times of quiet, rest, and solitude, we can also pray as part of our everyday tasks and work. God is present and active in these moments, too. This week, try to be aware of this truth and invite him to work through you.

Choose one routine activity—a household task or a regular part of your workweek—and take a brief moment to pray while you do it.

Using Proverbs 16:3 as a guide, pray something like, “God, you are in charge of my work. I commit it to you.”

PRACTICING REFLECTION

1. What are some of the tasks that God has given you to do?

2. How are you serving God where he has placed you?

3. Who are the people you are working alongside in your life? Write down the names of these key people below.
How is God using them?



MESSAGE NOTES

[illegible]

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[illegible]



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This week, consider some practical ways to stay connected to God and continue your spiritual journey. Below are some suggestions to prompt you; choose one or more of the practices listed to help you spend intentional time with God this week. Set aside a time and place that help you pause and be present with God.

PRACTICING SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION

Memorizing sections of the Bible helps us to carry God’s Word wherever we go.
Work toward memorizing **PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7** this week.

- Choose a translation of the Bible to use.
(If you’ve already memorized it in one translation, pick a new one.)
- Write it out and carry it with you.
- Set an alarm several times a day to reread it or write it out again.
- Look for a song that uses these words from Scripture that you can listen to regularly.

PRACTICING PRAYERS OF REMEMBERING

NEHEMIAH 4:14:
“Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious...”

Spend time with God looking back over your life so far. At what moments and in what places has God been at work?
Make a list of some of the most significant memories or examples of God’s faithfulness. Spend time worshiping God and thanking him:

PRACTICING FASTING

NEHEMIAH 9:1:

...the people assembled again, and this time they fasted and dressed in burlap and sprinkled dust on their heads.

Fasting is denying yourself food or some other appetite in order to seek God completely. Choose something to say no to this week (use your judgment if you have health concerns), and whenever you notice yourself hungry or craving it, let it be a prompt to pray. Pray for our church community in this season, for your participation in God's mission, and for all the things God places on your heart.

PRACTICING REFLECTION

1. What are some of the fears you are facing right now?

2. Have you experienced any opposition or struggles as you've walked with Jesus recently?

3. What is it like to remember God's faithfulness in past seasons of your life?

4. What is God inviting you to do in response?



MESSAGE NOTES

[illegible]

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- **What challenged, comforted, or resonated with you?**



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

This week, consider some practical ways to stay connected to God and continue your spiritual journey. Below are some suggestions to prompt you; choose one or more of the practices listed to help you spend intentional time with God this week. Set aside a time and place that help you pause and be present with God.

PRACTICING SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

Before you open your Bible, pause for a few moments of quiet. Ask God to meet you as you read and meditate.



Read **ISAIAH 26:1–4** several times, slowly.

What words or phrases stand out to you?

Talk to God about what you observe, wonder, and feel.

PRACTICING BIBLE STUDY

While we've spent time in the Old Testament story of Nehemiah and the people of God returning to Jerusalem, we can also reflect on and remember how the coming of Jesus continues and fulfills God's plan to rescue and restore us all.

- Read **Hebrews 10**. Consider reading it in several translations.
- What do you observe? What questions do you have? What are the overall themes? How does this section describe God?
- Once you've studied the chapter, pause and ask God if there is something he wants you to hear.

PRACTICING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

Make gratitude a regular practice this week. Work to make a list of all the specific blessings from God you experience. You could do this once, but ideally, try to do it multiple times throughout the week. Every time you write one down, say, “Thank you, God.”

Once you’ve made a list, pause and spend a moment with God. What might his response to your gratitude be?

PRACTICING REFLECTION

1. What has God been doing in you during this series? What do you celebrate? Where is he still working within you and around you?

2. What might surrender to God look like in your life? What is holding you back?

THE ERA OF EZRA & NEHEMIAH

THE OVERLAPPING HISTORIES OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

(adapted from Eugene Peterson)

OLD TESTAMENT							
PREHISTORIC		2100	2000	1900	1800	1700	1600
ADAM & EVE IN EDEN	NOAH & THE GLOBAL FLOOD	GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM					

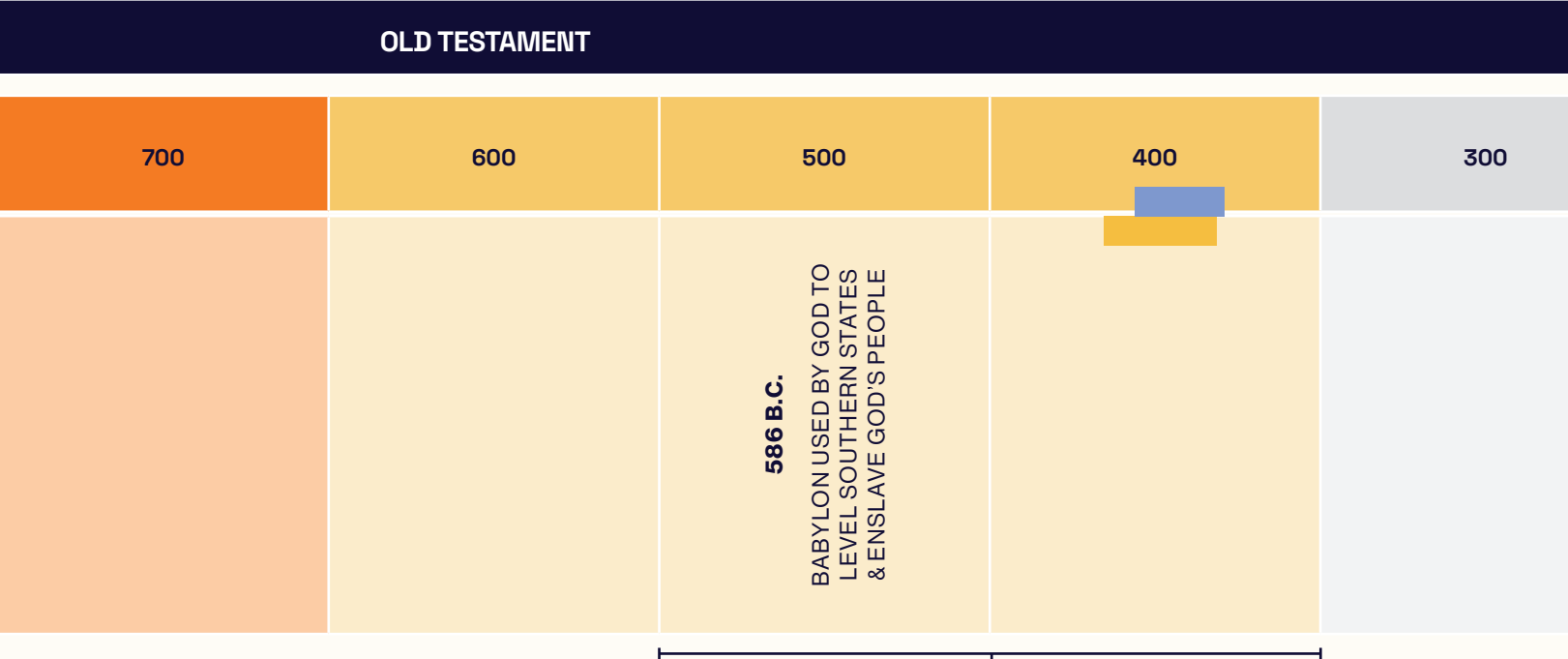
1500	1400	1300	1200	1100	1000	900	800
MOSES & GOD'S PEOPLE ENSLAVED IN EGYPT	JOSHUA LEADS GOD'S PEOPLE INTO THE PROMISED LAND				DAVID BECOMES KING; SON SOLOMON BUILDS TEMPLE; CIVIL WAR (10 NORTHERN STATES; 2 SOUTHERN STATES)		722 B.C. ASSYRIA USED BY GOD TO LEVEL NORTHERN STATES

- Ancient Israel's identity had been under constant challenge and threat. Whether by assault or seduction, the People of God had come perilously close to obliteration several times. About 1,000 years after **Moses** led them through the Red Sea, and about 400 years after **David** reigned as king, a superpower military machine, Babylon, severely battered them. Leaving their city and temple in a mound of rubble, they hauled the People of Israel off into a 70-year exile. A century later, a few Jews back in Jerusalem had been trying to put the pieces back together. But it was not going well at all, until one man of God arrived: **Ezra**.

THE ERA OF EZRA & NEHEMIAH CONTINUED

THE OVERLAPPING HISTORIES OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

(adapted from Eugene Peterson)



THE ERAS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH:

- † 605–597: Deportation to Babylon began (under King Nebuchadnezzar)
- † 587–586: Destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple
- † 539–538: God’s exiled people return to Jerusalem (under Cyrus of Persia)
- † 538–516: The Temple is rebuilt and worship practices restored
- † 458: Ezra returns to Jerusalem to reform holiness and renew covenant
- † 445–444: Nehemiah returns to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall

Ezra engaged Israel in the worship of God. This is how our God-formed identities become deeply embedded in us. Ezra also led them into a fresh listening to Scripture, something they had not been able to do for 70 years. Worship and Scripture continue today, as they did back then, to be foundational for recovering and maintaining our identity as the People of God.

Because of Ezra, Israel made it through. God didn’t leave Ezra to do this single-handedly; he gave him substantial and critical help in the rescue operation in the person of **Nehemiah**, whose work providentially converged with Ezra’s. Two men with two different vocations, but overlapping histories.

12 YEARS OF JOINT MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

NEHEMIAH (455–433 B.C.)

EZRA (458–432 B.C.)

			NEW TESTAMENT	
	200	100	0	100
			4 B.C. JESUS IS BORN	A.D. 30 JESUS IS CRUCIFIED & RAISED TO LIFE. THE CHURCH IS FOUNDED & SPREADS GLOBALLY

- By the brave and fearless leadership of two individuals, the People-of-God identity was recovered and preserved. God continues that eternal blessing for everyone today, through Jesus, in whom we discover our true identity.

Ezra was a scholar and teacher, working with the Scriptures. Nehemiah worked with stones and mortar. Separating life into distinct categories of “sacred” and “secular” disrupts any attempt to live to the glory of God as the People of God.

It is common for us to refer to the work of pastors, worship leaders and missionaries as “sacred,” and that of lawyers, farmers, and engineers as “secular.” It is also damaging. Work, by its very nature, is holy. The biblical story is dominated by people of faith who have jobs in gardening, shepherding, the military, politics, carpentry, tent making, homemaking, fishing, and more.

Nehemiah’s memoirs tell us that he started out as a government worker in the service of a foreign king, but then he changed careers—he became a building contractor, called by God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The stories of the two men are interwoven in a seamless fabric of vocational holiness. Neither job was more or less important or holy than the other. Nehemiah needed Ezra; Ezra needed Nehemiah. God’s people needed the work of both of them.



Here’s an excellent 8-minute overview of Ezra & Nehemiah from the Bible Project.

The background is a dark blue field featuring a subtle pattern of white-outlined squares and circles of various sizes, creating a geometric, architectural feel.

CONNECTING **EVERYONE
TO JESUS & HIS MISSION**

BRIGHTER—FURTHER—TOGETHER



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